

to First Lady Laura Bush in a special ceremony at the White House on November 26, 2007.

This year's Official White House Christmas Tree is a fine example of the exceptional quality of Christmas trees that we have in North Carolina. According to the North Carolina Department of Agriculture, in 2006 North Carolina led the nation in Christmas tree production, providing roughly one out of every four Christmas trees in the United States, and contributing over \$134 million to North Carolina's economy. But this success did not come easily; it takes several years of meticulous care and attention to raise a Christmas tree. An average 7 foot tree is about 10 years old, and throughout that time the grower diligently shapes, grooms, and fertilizes the tree several times per year. Not many people realize the years of hard work and sacrifice that go into raising a Christmas tree, and our growers are to be commended for their continuous success.

North Carolina celebrates a rich history of Christmas Trees, and year after year, many American families enjoy the warmth and beauty of these North Carolina trees that are a symbol of the holiday season. I am proud of the hard work exhibited by our Christmas tree growers in North Carolina, and I am proud that there will be another North Carolina Christmas tree in the White House this year.●

#### TRIBUTE TO MAJOR GENERAL DANIEL J. DARNELL

● Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, today I pay tribute to a great leader and an exceptional officer of the U.S. Air Force, MG Daniel J. Darnell, now serving as the Director of Legislative Liaison for Office of the Secretary of the Air Force, as he prepares to leave this position for one of even greater importance.

A command pilot with more than 4,500 flying hours, primarily in the F-15A/B/C/D and F-16C/D, Major General Darnell has commanded at the squadron, group, wing, and warfare center levels and has flown combat missions in Iraq, enforcing no-fly zones during operations Northern and Southern Watch. Major General Darnell continues to provide outstanding leadership, advice, and sound professional judgment on numerous critical issues of enduring importance to the Air Force, Congress, and this Nation.

Major General Darnell was born at March Air Force Base in California, where his father flew with Curtis LeMay as a B-29 radio operator, later retired as a B-52 tail gunner. He graduated as valedictorian from the Virginia Military Institute in 1975 and, immediately following graduation, he entered the Air Force and was recognized as a distinguished graduate from the Air Force ROTC Program. Major General Darnell was selected to attend pilot training at Reese Air Force Base

in Texas and was again at the top of his class, graduating pilot training as a Distinguished Graduate. Upon completion of pilot training, Major General Darnell was selected to fly the F-15, the Air Force's premier air-to-air fighter. He was initially assigned to the 7th Tactical Fighter Squadron at Holloman Air Force Base but then moved overseas to Kadena Air Base in Japan. At Kadena, Major General Darnell again excelled in the air and on the ground leading to his selection as instructor pilot, flight examiner, and the sole F-15 aerial demonstration pilot in the Pacific.

In 1982, Major General Darnell was selected to attend the F-15 Fighter Weapons Instructor Course at Nellis Air Force Base in Nevada, an honor only bestowed on the top fighter pilots in the U.S. Air Force. After graduating, he returned to Kadena as the squadron weapons officer and then was assigned to McChord Air Force Base in Washington, first as the Chief of Standardization and Evaluation, and then as Chief of Weapons and Tactics. His weapons expertise, coupled with his superior leadership, led him back to Nellis Air Force Base and the U.S. Air Force Fighter Weapons School in 1986 where he was a Fighter Weapons Instructor Course instructor, flight commander and operations officer, providing the most advanced air-to-air training in weapons and tactics employment in the world.

Following a staff assignment to Headquarters Tactical Air Command at Langley Air Force Base, Virginia, as the Chief of Weapons and Tactics, Major General Darnell was selected as the 20th commander and leader of the U.S. Air Force Thunderbirds, "America's Ambassadors in Blue." Major General Darnell flew the F-16 as Thunderbird lead for 2 years, performing hundreds of aerial demonstrations for millions of people all over the globe. In 1994, he was hand-picked to attend National War College in Washington, DC, where he received a master's degree in national security policy.

In 1997, Major General Darnell became the commander of the 12th Operations Group at Randolph Air Force Base where he was responsible for conducting joint and allied pilot instructor training as well as Air Force and Navy undergraduate combat systems officer training. He returned to the F-16 in 1998 and commanded the 20th Fighter Wing at Shaw Air Force Base in South Carolina and then 31st Wing at Aviano Air Base in Italy.

Major General Darnell returned to Nellis Air Force Base in 2001 as commander, 57th Wing, the largest composite wing in the Air Force. During that time, he deployed to Prince Sultan Air Base in Saudi Arabia where he was the Senior Director of the Combined Air Operations Center during the opening weeks and months of Operation Iraqi Freedom. In 2003, Major General Darnell was assigned to Schriever Air Force Base in Colorado

as the commander of the Space Warfare Center where he was responsible for advancing America's space capabilities and employment concepts.

For the past 2 years, Major General Darnell has been the Director of Legislative Liaison. During that time, he laid the legislative groundwork for procurement of four new major weapon systems, including Joint Strike Fighter, Joint Cargo Aircraft, Next Generation Combat Search and Rescue platform, and the \$20 billion KC-X, the Air Force's No. 1 acquisition priority. His leadership, vision, and political acumen allowed the Air Force to break through years of congressional restrictions on aircraft retirements, resulting in the landmark \$4 billion 2007 National Defense Authorization Act language, a milestone year for Air Force recapitalization and fleet management. He flawlessly orchestrated the movement of more than 1,500 congressional delegation trips for Members and staff throughout the world.

Major General Darnell's mastery of complex issues and decisive leadership guided Air Force relations with Congress through a myriad of difficult issues to include Base Realignment and Closure, Total Force Integration, and a 40,000 personnel drawdown. Additionally, he was responsible for effectively communicating a consistent Air Force message that was the driving force behind approval of an unprecedented multiyear funding authorization for the F-22A Raptor, garnering approximately \$411 million in Air Force savings.

On behalf of Congress and the United States of America, I thank Major General Darnell, his wife Vickie, and their entire family for their continued commitment, sacrifice, and contribution to this great Nation. I congratulate Major General Darnell on his selection to the rank of lieutenant general and wish him success as he transitions into his new job as Deputy Chief of Staff for Air, Space and Information Operations, Plans and Requirements.●

#### TRIBUTE TO DR. ANDREW MAYS

● Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, today I want to commend a distinguished resident of the State of Alabama, Dr. Andrew Mays. Dr. Mays lives in Birmingham, AL. He is a well-respected member of the medical community in our State, serving as a faculty member in the University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Medicine's Department of Ophthalmology, as well as operating a private clinical practice. He serves our State public education and health systems at the Callahan Eye Foundation Hospital, where he concentrates his research and practice in combating the devastating effects of the eye disease glaucoma. Dr. Mays also sits on the Board of Directors for the Alabama Academy of Ophthalmology.

However, I speak to you today not to praise Dr. Mays for his accomplishments in medicine, but to congratulate